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AUTHOR Bowen, J. Donald
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a morphophonemic analysis of the characteristics that distinguish verb structure in New Mexican Spanish from that of Standard Spanish. Verb structure and classification are discussed, and verbs are analyzed as being composed of four components: stem, thematic vowel, tense-aspect, and person-number. Verbs are classified as regular or irregular according to deviations in these four components. The following phonological rules and tendencies are proposed as highlighting significant points of contrast between Standard and New Mexican Spanish: /yy/ becomes /y/; /cy/ becomes /c/; /y/ drops if the first vowel is stressed and is higher or more front than the second (excluding/u/); /Vr#/ becomes /Vre#/; /gw/ becomes /w/; New Mexican Spanish avoids certain Standard Spanish consonant clusters and sequences; New Mexican Spanish has patterned reductions in the normal stream of speech. The paper concludes that verb patterns in New Mexican Spanish identify it as a distinctive dialect of Standard Spanish; that these modifications are logical and produce more regular patterns; and that New Mexican Spanish deserves to be counted among the prestige dialects of Modern Spanish. (AM)

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New Mexican Spanish Verb Forms

In studying the pronunciation and grammatical structure of New Mexican Spanish, I have attempted a treatment based strictly on the dialect represented.[1] This approach deliberately avoids a tradition that has influenced much of the research in Hispanic dialect studies, a tradition illustrated, and no doubt encouraged by, the Navarro Tomás Cuestionario Lingüístico Hispanoamericano, first published in 1943. The Cuestionario provides a checklist of possible deviations from Standard Spanish, and the presentation of a particular Spanish dialect consists of identifying points where "the dialect" differs from standard. The assumption is that where not otherwise indicated, the standard forms occur.

While the Cuestionario approach does facilitate comparative studies, within its own framework, the inventory checklist involves descriptive perils, chief among which is distortion because of incomplete listing.

Very often, and especially when lay scholars are involved, Spanish dialect studies are organized and presented in the traditional orthography of Spanish. French and English are conceded the necessity of a transcription, but Spanish is assumed not to need a respelling, thanks to the excellent system used for its representation in written form. It is indeed an excellent system, rationally devised and kept current by periodic modest updating, which embodies a fair compromise between continuity with the past and adaptation to changing needs. But Spanish spelling is just good, not perfect. Navarro Tomás recognizes the need for a phonetic alphabet in his studies on Spanish pronunciation,

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1. This presentation derives from a more detailed study titled "Structural Analysis of the Verb System in New Mexican Spanish," which will appear in Studies in Southwest Spanish, Newbury House (forthcoming ~~1974~~ 1975).

pointing out that "La ortografía oficial española, aunque más fonética que la de otros idiomas, dista mucho de reflejar convenientemente la pronunciación."[2]

I have decided to follow Navarro Tomás' advice, and to use a spelling that represents as accurately as possible the relevant phonological details of the material gathered and analyzed. Then there is no need to be concerned about the be de burro/be de baka confusion, the silent relic h, or the duplications of c-k-qu, s-c-z-x, j-g-x, ll-y, g-gu. Also there is a motivation for not maintaining historical spelling when sounds have dropped, so the word for "mile" can be spelled mía. Finally it removes the necessity of deciding whether to use -ear or -iar in representing neologisms with the highly productive verbalizing suffix /-yár/, as in /batyár/.

Verbs in New Mexican Spanish are identified as forms that inflect to indicate person, number, and tense-aspect-mode. Also verbs are the only forms that participate with object pronouns in the grammatical process of enclisis.

The basic form of the verb, from which all of the inflected forms can be constructed, is the infinitive, or more precisely the infinitive stem. In the case of infinitives ending in /-r/ the infinitive stem is what remains after removing the /-Vr/ suffixes. To the infinitive stem are added various inflectional suffixes which indicate person, number, and tense-aspect-mode.

One of three vowels appears before the final /-r/ of the infinitive: /a ~ e ~ i/. Which one appears depends on the stem chosen. These are called "theme vowels" and serve to identify verbs as belonging to one of three classes: /a/-theme, /e/-theme, and /i/-theme verbs.

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2. Manual de pronunciacion española. (8ª ed.) New York: Hafner, 1957, pp. 31-32.

The inflection pattern of all verbs is determined by the theme class to which they belong, as there are different patterns for each class. The theme recurs throughout nearly all of the inflections, though often changed in form.

It is interesting to see how the inventory of verbs is distributed in the theme classes. The corpus on which the present analysis rests includes a lexicon in dictionary form of an estimated 4,050 main entries (plus almost 700 sub entries) of which 796 items or 19.5 per cent are verbs. The 796 verbs are distributed by theme class as follows:

Total		/a/-theme		/e/-theme		/i/-theme		Ø-theme	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
796	100	626	78.6	94	11.8	74	9.3	2	0.3

There is another kind of classification of verb forms, made in terms of the total inflection pattern, i.e., the extent to which the inflectional pattern conforms to general rules. The majority of Spanish verbs follow a single pattern of stem formation and affixation and are called "regular verbs," but there are also patterns of deviation which classify verbs into various minor sets, usually referred to as irregular patterns, or irregular verbs.

The verb classification I propose presents each verb pattern as consisting of four components: stem, theme, tense (or more specifically "tense-aspect") marker, and personal ending (combining person and number). Regular verbs have an invariable stem, which appears unchanged in all forms in the paradigm. The stem selects its theme (and "theme class"), and these combine in a consistent pattern with the tense and person suffixes. Details of this classification (for Standard Spanish)

can be seen in the contrastive study titled The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish, pp. 106-107.[3]

In New Mexico Spanish the /e/ and /i/ theme classes have almost coalesced. Only the infinitive and the infinitive based forms (the future and conditional sets) show any difference.

Irregular verbs can be classified by the type of deviation from the regular pattern. Some have stem variants but fully regular sets of affixes. Another type has stem and theme variations. Another has stem, theme, and tense variations. Finally, a few have variations in all four slots: stem, theme, tense, and person endings.

It is of some interest to look at the patterns of irregularity to see how many verbs fall in each category. In descending order of numerical importance, the figures are:

			Examples
1. Regular verbs	518	or 65.1% of total 796	ablár komér bibír
2. Three stem y → e vocalization	113	or 14.3%	saynyár taypyár
3. Stem-vowel changing class I	69	or 8.7%	kontár pensár
4. Velar stem extension	23	or 2.9%	konosér
	723	91.0%	

The other 35 patterns range from 1 to 8 verbs, only one of these patterns reaching as high as 1.0%. Twenty-eight of the 35 patterns have only one verb or one verb and its compounds.

3. Robert P. Stockwell, J. Donald Bowen, and John W. Martin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

These figures are of course derived from the verbs that happened to get into the corpus, and there is no pretense to completeness or balance. On the other hand, no collecting technique used would have particularly skewed the proportions.

What are the distinguishing characteristics of New Mexican Spanish (phonological, morphological, and lexical), and what are the significant points of contrast that differentiate New Mexican from Standard Spanish?

There are a number of phonological rules, tendencies, and miscellaneous variations which are an integral part of the structural patterns of Spanish. Phonological rules need to be considered separately since while they have important effects on morphological patterns, the resulting patterns of variance should not properly speaking be considered irregular, since variants are phonologically conditioned. For example the verb /leyér/ has a stem ending in /y/, to which can be affixed several endings which begin with /y/. Thus the imperfective participle is formed of stem and affixes as follows: /ley-yéndo/. But the form that actually appears is not */leyyéndo/, but /leyéndo/. This could be described by saying there is a stem change /ley- → le-/ before affixing /-yéndo/, thus /le-yéndo/. Or one could say that the theme /ye/ becomes /e/ after the stem /ley-/, so the analysis is /ley-éndo/. Both solutions complicate the morphology, unnecessarily I think. The simplest solution is to say that two /y/ sounds in succession are not permitted in NMSp (or in SSp), and after the morphological pieces are put together, a very general phonological rule applies: /yy → y/. Not only is the verb /leyér/ thus considered regular, but the rule likewise applies to /kreyér, rreyír, sonrreyír, oyér, rroyír, friyír, tuyír, kontituyír, kontrebuyír/ and optionally to /káy, tráy/.

This is particularly relevant to a comparison of NMSp and SSp, since the pattern of a stem ending in /-Vy/ is relatively rare in SSp. The same verbs in SSp are /leér, kreér, rreír, sonrreír, oír, roér, freír, tulyír, konstituír, kontribuír, kaér, traér/.

Another phonological pattern with consequences in the verb paradigm can be stated as a similar rule: /cy → c/. Just as /y/ after /y/ can be said to be deleted, so is /y/ after /c/. This rule probably applies in SSp, but again there are more applications in NMSp, since the verbalizing ending /-yár/ is so frequent. The equivalent ending in SSp is /-eár/, which has an /e/ that does not assimilate into /c/, thus SSp /borraceár/. To see the effect in the NMSp verb pattern one must recall the pattern of irregular verbs described as a /y → e/ vocalization. This pattern shows a stem variation of /-y ~ -e ~ -ey/. The present rule (/cy → c/) modifies this to /-Ø ~ -e ~ -ey/ for some verbs (those included in this pattern--not all are, e.g. /ecár/) that have a stem ending in /c/. Thus the following example verbs are in the same pattern:

infinitive	/batyár/	/picár/
1 sg present indicative	/batéo/	/picéo/
1 sg present subjunctive	/batéye/	/picéye/

Again the phonological rule permits a simpler morphological description.

A third phonological rule applies only to NMSp. It is essentially simple, though its description may seem complex. It is: /$\acute{V}^1$yV^2 → $\acute{V}^1V^2$/ if /$\acute{V}^1$/ is /í/ and /V^2/ is /e, a, o/ or if /$\acute{V}^1$/ is /é/ and /V^2/ is /a, o/. Formulated as a description this rule says that a /y/ between two vowels drops if the first vowel is stressed and is higher or fronter than the second (excluding the vowel /u/). The operation of this rule can be seen in NMSp /mía/ and /béo/, which

in SSp could be either /mía, béo/ or /míya, béyo/ (or in Castilian Spanish /míʎa, béʎo/). Thus a NMSp verb like /kreyér/ would regularly yield a 1 sg present form indicative /kréyo/, but by the present rule this form becomes /kréo/.

A fourth phonological rule explains the appearance of a paragogic /-e/ added to the infinitive form when this is followed by a phrase-marking juncture. The rule can be formalized as /V́r# → V́re#/. The addition of a final /-e/ before a pause or phrase break can also be noted after /n/ or /l/, but in these cases the /-e/ is optional, may or may not occur. Rarely does a verb form end in /-l/, though of course /-n/ is frequent. Sentence-final infinitives are almost always spoken with this final /-e/, as in /disíre, platikáre, ponére, sembráre, trabaxáre/, etc. The final /-e/ never appears if another word follows without pause.

A fifth phonological rule affects the shape if not the patterns of certain /a/-theme verbs. The sequence /gw/ (some might say the affricate) is weakened to a light frictional, symbolized here as /w/. Thus the forms of the verbs with an initial or intervocalic occurrence of this sound are: /wacár, wardár, weldyár, awantár, awardár, awitár/. The equivalent in SSp is usually spelled "gu" and pronounced /gw/, with the /g/ prominently heard.

In addition to phonological rules, which must apply whenever the specified conditions of occurrence are met, regardless of what morphemes or words are involved, we can also speak of phonological tendencies. These refer to phenomena of a general nature which may apply under certain conditions. An example of a phonological tendency in NMSp is the avoidance of certain consonant clusters or sequences which were undoubtedly present in earlier forms of the language and

which still occur in SSp. There are at least two ways to eliminate a sequence; one is to insert a vowel between two consonants that would otherwise be juxtaposed. Thus /obetenér/ in NMSp shows the insertion of the neutral vowel /e/ between the two stops /b/ and /t/. Perhaps the avoidance of a sequence /bt/ in NMSp is properly the subject of a phonological rule, though I found no other examples of a separation of /b/ and /t/, probably because /b/ is very rare in syllable-final position where it might produce a /bt/ sequence. Another example of a sequence of consonants that has been separated is the /ns/ in /konesexár/, which is /akonsexár/ in SSp. But this avoidance of /ns/ is definitely not the effect of a general rule, since there are numerous forms in which the sequence /ns/ occurs in NMSp: /kansár, frunsír, kombensér, komensár, agrimensár/, etc. So /konesexár/ is an individual case. Finally there is a separation of the cluster /tr/ in /tirinyár/, apparently a back-formation from /tirinéo/, which in SSp is /trinéo/. Again the frequent occurrence of /tr/ as a cluster eliminates the possibility of a rule-governed description: /trabaxár, tragár, treskilár, trocár/, etc.

Sequences and clusters of consonants can also be eliminated by the simple expedient of dropping one of the consonants. A rule seems to prevent a /ks/ sequence in NMSp, judging by the forms /esaminár, esistír, estendér, esprimentár, kolesyonár/, in which /ks/ has become /s/; cf SSp /eksaminár, eksistír, ekstendér, eksperimentár, koleksyonár/. Likewise /kt → t/ in /erutár, koletár, konetár/; cf SSp /eruktár, kolektár, konektár/.

Finally a very general phonological tendency, probably present in every language, is the effect of patterned reductions in the normal stream of speech, particularly in informal or conversational styles.

These accommodations of sounds and sequences of sounds in a phonological environment are variously referred to as elisions, normal assimilations, slurring, or sloppy pronunciation depending on one's attitude toward the processes. The specific changes probably stretch across a range of acceptability from established patterns to careless vulgarisms, but some recur so often and so normally they must be acknowledged. In Spanish, since there are so many open syllables, these particularly involve the effects on each other of contiguous vowels. In general, like vowels reduce, unaccented high vowels become nonvocalic onglides or offglides, and an unaccented low vowel drops before a mid vowel, producing such changes as:

/andába ayér/	→	/andáb ayér/
/éste és/	→	/ést és/
/éso ótro/	→	/és ótro/
/de ónde éres/	→	/dy ónd éres/
/mi amígo/	→	/my amígo/
/tú as bísto/	→	/tw ás bísto/
/téngo algúna/	→	/téngw algúna/
/le interésa/	→	/le ynterésa/
/la usába/	→	/la wsába/
/ábla ólga/	→	/ábl ólga/
/para ensenyár/	→	/par ensenyár/

Consonants too are modified, especially those that commonly occur in word-final position. The following examples show the aspiration and frequent omission of final /-s/:

/binímos de/	→	/binímo de/
/ótra bés rrepíto/	→	/ótra bé rrepíto/
/bayláte múnco/	→	/bayláte múnco/
/rrekwérdemos de/	→	/rrekwérdemo de/

When the /-s/ drops it normally leaves a final vowel, which itself may be affected by regular patterns of assimilation:

/kwántos ányos tyénes/ → /kwántw ányos tyénes/

Final /r/ often drops before /l/:

/para tené-lo/ → /para tené-lo/

/bóy a preguntár-le/ /wa preguntá-le/

/no debía dexár-los/ /no deía dexá-los/

There are a number of patterns in the verb structure that serve to identify NMSp as a distinctive dialect. There are also a number of verbs or verb forms with individual features that can also be cited as distinctive while not affecting the entire paradigm. These are:

1. The elimination of all 2 pl forms
2. The elimination of /-yése/ past subjunctive forms
3. The relocation as a closing suffix of the /s/ in 2 sg preterit forms: /baylátes/
4. The restructuring of /i/-theme verbs to correspond to /e/-theme in 1 pl present indicative forms: /bibémos - bibímos/
5. The regularizing of accent placement on the stem of all present subjunctive forms, with implications for irregular verb patterns which change when stressed: /pwédamos/
6. The regularizing of the endings of /e/-theme and /i/-theme verbs whose stems end in /x/, particularly /dixyéron, truxyéron/
7. The very general reduction of the suffixes of perfect participles of /a/-theme verbs: /-ádo/ → /-áo/
8. A class, albeit small (two members), of verbs whose infinitive form does not have a theme vowel or aspect marker (no /-Vr/ ending): /káy, tráy/

9. The general vitality and productivity of /-yár/ as a verbalizing affix

The extensive occurrence of verbs ending in /-yár/ with a conjugation pattern in which the stem-final /-y/ vocalizes to /-e/ is a distinctive characteristic of NMSp. As we have seen, over fourteen per cent of the verbs in the corpus studied follow this pattern. Not only is this the favorite form for new entries to the NMSp verb category, but a number of verbs have been restructured in this pattern, illustrated by /byaxyár, cokyár, cistyár, kosinyár, lustryár, trotyár/, etc.

The SSp pattern in /-eár/ is active but not as productive as the /-yár/ affix in NMSp, perhaps because loans are not entering SSp as fast as in NMSp. Following is a list of sample loan words from English in NMSp:

/bakyár/	to back
/blofyár/	to bluff
/bompyár/	to bump
/caynyár/	to shine
/cekyár/	to check
/cutyár/	to shoot
/eskrinyár/	to screen (as sand)
/fulyár/	to fool

So active and productive is the /-yár/ verbalizing suffix that its influence accounts for a number of backformations in NMSp, verbs constructed on the basis of lexical items already available. Examples are:

/cilóte/ just formed ear of corn — /cilotyár/ to form ears (of corn)

/faséto/	smart, affected	/fasetyár/	to show off
/kostúra/	sewing	/kosturyár/	to sew

etc.

New Mexican Spanish, or to be conservatively specific, the dialect of San Antoñito, offers an opportunity to study one form of Southwest Spanish, a form which can be aptly characterized as expressive and efficient. The limited number of modifications introduced (judging from comparison with Standard Spanish) are in general logical, tending to produce simpler paradigms and more regular patterns. One could suggest an ideal world in which Spanish speakers could well adopt some of the variant forms common in the usage of San Antoñito.

New Mexican Spanish can and should take its place among the prestige dialects of the Spanish-speaking world, studied for its richness and potential for contribution to the Hispanic tradition. If we do this we can put out of business those externally-oriented authors of textbooks for Hispanos whose aim is to launder away all that is distinctive and characteristic.

J. Donald Bowen
University of California
Los Angeles